

## **A LifeCare Guide: Coping With Violence**

The recent sniper shootings in the Washington D.C. area have left local residents—and communities across the nation—shocked, saddened and concerned. This guide offers tips and information on protecting yourself and your family against random acts of violence and talking to your children about violence. *Note*—This guide is for informational purposes only. If you are having difficulty coping, please contact a professional counselor or your medical provider for assistance. If you have any information about the attacks, contact the appropriate authorities immediately.

### **Coping With Reactions to the Violence**

Random violence like the sniper attacks can result in a variety of emotions including anxiety, stress, helplessness, fear, irritability and anger. You may also suffer from inability to concentrate, loss of appetite and nightmares. All of these reactions are normal but if you do not address them, you can jeopardize your health. If you or a family member are having difficulty coping, do not hesitate to get help. In addition, the following tips may help:

- Reach out to supportive friends and family for comfort and guidance.
- Be patient with yourself.
- Try to maintain a nutritious diet and exercise regularly (with permission of your doctor) to relieve stress and keep your energy up.
- Focus on your breathing—deep, slow breaths will help calm you.
- Talk to a crisis counselor. Authorities have set up hotlines staffed by crisis counselors to help people cope. Please see the Helpful Resources at the end of this guide for more information.
- Ask your employer if they offer an EAP (Employee Assistance Program). An EAP counselor can provide counseling on a wide range of issues, including stress, anxiety, dealing with a tragedy and more.

### **How Children React to Acts of Violence**

With the media's coverage of the shootings, virtually all children will be aware of the violence. How they respond will vary depending on the child's age, personality and maturity level. Some children, particularly those age nine and under, may be unable to grasp the reality of the shootings. Others may be frightened that something could happen to them. Even children as young as infants and toddlers may become fussy or cry more often in response to the anxiety and stress their parents and caregivers may be experiencing.

### **Signs of Anxiety In Children**

Children react to fear and anxiety in different ways, however there are some common reactions to watch for, including:

- Disrupted sleep patterns—frequent nightmares and/or insomnia



- Changes in eating habits
- Unusual clinginess
- Decline in school performance
- Lack of concentration
- Regression
- Irritability
- Increased irritability, frustration and/or aggression

Remember, these symptoms are common reactions to anxiety. However, if symptoms persist for a prolonged period of time and disrupt your child's daily routine, seek help from a pediatrician, psychologist or social worker. A professional can help your child deal with his or her emotions and can provide valuable tips and guidance to parents.

If someone you know was a victim of the shootings, you may need additional help coping. For more information, please see these other Guides in the LifeCare® education series:

- *Grief and Bereavement*
- *Helping Others Cope With Grief*
- *Helping Children Cope With Grief*

### **Talking to Your Child About Violence**

Regardless of how your child responds, he or she will be looking to you for answers, guidance and support. Speak to your child openly and honestly, adapting your conversations to the age of your child. Children deserve honest answers, regardless of their age. You do not have to provide every detail, but don't hold back too much information either; instill trust in your child while helping him or her understand what happened. In addition, the following tips may help:

- **Encourage your child to express his or her feelings.** Children usually feel better when they can talk about their feelings. To help your child sort out his or her feelings, ask specific questions such as "How do you feel? Does it make you feel scared? What worries you the most?" Encourage your child to be honest and open, and listen carefully for clues about hidden feelings or worries.
- **Reassure your child.** Respond to your child's feelings; acknowledge his or her fears; and continually reassure your child that he or she is safe. Stress that this is a rare incident, but avoid making false promises such as "Nothing like this will ever happen to you." Instead, offer your love, support and guidance and say things such as "I am here to protect you and to help keep you safe." In addition, remind your child that the police are also looking out for his or her safety.
- **Monitor the media.** Monitor and limit the amount of television your child watches. If your child sees disturbing footage of incidents of the shootings, his or her fears and anxieties may escalate.
- **Speak to your child's school administrators.** Ask your child's teachers and/or school principal how they have addressed the shootings. Many schools speak to



students about safety issues, and reassure them that they are doing everything possible to keep the children safe.

- **Pay close attention to your child.** If your child was involved or a witness to an incident of violence, pay close attention to your child's behavior. If you notice any unusual behavior, it may be a reaction to stress, fear or trauma. Learn how to recognize warning signs (as described in the previous section) and seek professional help from a counselor, social worker, psychologist or other professional if necessary.

## **Helpful Resources**

### **Mental Health Resources**

The following hotlines have been set up to help those who need help coping with the attacks.

#### **Montgomery Count Crisis Center**

240-777-4000

#### **Prince George's County Mental Health Hotlines:**

301-864-7153

301-864-7161

301-864-7130

#### **D.C. Mental Health Hotline**

888-7WE-HELP (888-793-4357)

#### **Tip Line**

If you have any information about the sniper attacks, please call the tip line.

888-324-9800

#### **Montgomery County Reward Fund**

The Montgomery County Reward Fund was established to encourage anyone with information about the sniper attacks to call one of the tip lines listed above. Anyone who provides information leading to the arrest and indictment of the person or people responsible for the attacks may be eligible for the reward. Contributions to the fund are also being accepted.

**For information call:** 240-777-2500 or visit <http://www.co.mo.md.us/news/press/02-400.html>

#### **To make contributions:**

Online contribution form: <https://www.emontgomery.org/sniperfund/payment.cfm>

Credit card contributions by telephone: 240-777-8970

Contributions by check: Make checks payable to the Montgomery County Reward Fund and mail them to Offices of the County Executive, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville, MD 20850



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